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SUBJECT: GOE REFUTES USG VIEWS ON BELGIAN FUNDING OF CUBAN DOCTORS

REF: SECSTATE 133266

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires AI Kevin Herbert, for reasons 1.4 (b&d )

1. (C) ACDM made reftel points to MFA U/S for Bilateral Affairs Susan Alvear on July 22.

2. (C) Alvear countered our views with the "beggars can't be choosers" argument, saying that with USG and IFI assistance ever-shrinking, the GOE must turn to other donors to meet its social needs. It was in no position to risk any assistance by putting conditions on donors such as the Belgian government, in this case.

3. (C) Alvear differed with the USG view that the downsides of Cuban medical assistance far outweigh the benefits. Ecuador has benefited from Cuban medical assistance and expertise combating tropical disease and HIV/AIDS for years, and also from exchanges of professionals in sports, culture and other areas. Apart from a few defections (which presumably strained relations with the GOC), this assistance has not entailed political cost. Nor has the government of Cuba threatened to withdraw its assistance to exact political leverage here, she asserted.

4. (C) Finally, Alvear asserted that the working conditions and rights of Cuban doctors seconded by the GOC was an internal Cuban matter. She estimated that the Belgian-funded project would involve only 6-10 Cuban doctors in Ecuador at any one time.

Comment  
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5. (C) With FM Parra publicly envisioning greater cooperation with Venezuela in the social sector, explicitly involving more Cuban doctors, it is not surprising that Alvear would minimize USG concerns, refusing to consider available alternatives. We are becoming convinced the GOE's insistence that it can accept aid without political consequences is more disingenuous than naive.

HERBERT